



United States  
Environmental Protection  
Agency

# Kalamazoo River Cleanup Decisions on Hold

**Allied Paper/Portage Creek/Kalamazoo River Superfund Site**  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

June 2004

## Public information meeting

EPA invites you to learn about the new and important developments since our last meeting about the cleanup of the Allied Paper/Portage Creek/Kalamazoo River Superfund site. The meeting agenda will include information about river modeling and upcoming facilitated negotiations involving EPA, responsible parties, state agencies, and the Kalamazoo River Natural Resource Trustees. The meeting will be held on:

**Tuesday, June 29**

**6-8 p.m.**

**Plainwell High School**

**684 Starr Road**

If you need special accommodations to attend, contact EPA Community Involvement Coordinator Don de Blasio.

## Contact EPA

For more information or comments about the Kalamazoo River project you may contact these EPA representatives:

### **Don de Blasio**

Community Involvement  
Coordinator (P-19J)

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(312) 886-4360 or (800) 621-8431,  
weekdays 10 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

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*Allied Paper Landfill*

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will delay its cleanup plan for the Kalamazoo River while the Agency works on three important developments surrounding the Superfund site. One of those developments is a question about the fate of the state-owned dams on the river. EPA is discussing with Michigan agencies whether to tear out the dams during the cleanup process or keep them intact. EPA also needs time to conduct a special type of scientific study called "modeling," which will precisely track contamination in and along the river. EPA will also begin legal negotiations between the parties held responsible for the pollution, Michigan agencies and the Kalamazoo River Natural Resource Trustees.

## Impoundment study and dams

EPA had been conducting an in-depth review known as a remedial investigation/feasibility study on one portion of the Superfund site. The study was done on riverbanks and flood plain areas, called impoundments, behind the Plainwell and Otsego City dams. The impoundments hold tons of soil and sediment (mud) contaminated with the chemical compound polychlorinated biphenyls, commonly called PCBs. PCBs were released in the waste of paper mills along the Kalamazoo River. EPA believes the Plainwell and Otsego City impoundments may be releasing PCBs into the river.

As many concerned residents in the area know, EPA was supposed to release its cleanup recommendations for the Plainwell and Otsego City



*12th Street Landfill*

impoundments last year. EPA's progress has been slowed due to ongoing discussions between EPA, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and Michigan Department of Natural Resources over the future of the state-owned dams. The state of Michigan owns the Plainwell dam as well as the Otsego and Trowbridge dams. The Otsego City dam and two other dams on the Kalamazoo River are privately or municipally owned structures. The state agencies and many members of the Kalamazoo River community share the goal of restoring the river to a more natural system by removing these dams and excavating all contaminated sediment, banks and flood plains that are behind each dam and disposing of the material off-site.

EPA's progress toward developing a cleanup plan was further slowed because Agency scientists could not determine with enough accuracy what effect each of the riverbank options evaluated in the remedial investigation/feasibility study, such as excavation or stabilization, would have on PCB levels in fish. In other words, EPA could not answer the important question of whether Kalamazoo River fish would be safe to eat within a reasonable time frame if EPA took an action to reduce, eliminate or control erosion of PCBs from the banks.

### Where EPA stands today

Questions about the dams and PCB levels in fish prompted EPA to conclude that it needs to do a modeling study on the Kalamazoo River. The Agency performed modeling at other large sediment sites such as the Fox River in Wisconsin and the Hudson River in New York. Modeling should help answer the question of how much of the contaminated riverbank, sediment and flood plain areas will need to be removed or controlled so that Kalamazoo River fish will be safe to eat within a

reasonable time. Modeling should also show what would happen to PCB levels in fish if the dams are removed. Because these questions need to be answered before a cleanup option can be chosen, EPA decided to postpone finishing its remedial investigation/feasibility study for the Plainwell and Otsego City impoundments.

EPA also decided that during the time it will take to complete a model, it will continue discussions with the Michigan agencies on the future of the state-owned dams. And also during this time, EPA will begin the legal negotiations with the responsible parties, MDEQ, MDNR and the Natural Resource Trustees.

### How modeling works

Modeling is a process that identifies all PCB sources in the river. Those sources could include PCBs coming from upstream, eroding banks or ground water (underground supplies of fresh water) seeping into the river. Modeling will help explain how the PCBs are moving within the Kalamazoo River and where they end up – in sediment, on surface water or in living things such as fish and plants. This information can then be used to evaluate what effect a cleanup option (such as dredging or capping) will have on reducing PCBs in fish to safe levels. Modeling will also help to show how long that process will take (five years, 10 years or 20 years). This type of modeling is very different from the U.S. Geological Survey study that looked at sediment movement but did not study how PCBs move and their effect on fish. Modeling conducted on the Fox and Hudson rivers, which are contaminated with large amounts of PCBs, allowed EPA to make a scientific and legal case that required the responsible parties to pay for the cleanups. EPA will begin developing the Kalamazoo river model this summer. The Agency expects to receive some, but not all the results within a year.



*A-Site Landfill*





*Willow Boulevard Landfill*

### Facilitated negotiations with responsible parties

Facilitated legal negotiations will involve the responsible parties and the governmental parties that have a legal claim against the responsible parties for pollution in the Kalamazoo River. These parties include MDEQ and the Natural Resource Trustees, comprising MDEQ, Michigan Attorney General, U.S. Department of Interior and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. MDNR will also participate since it has responsibility for the state dams and contaminated banks, river and flood plains on the Kalamazoo River. A professional facilitator will help guide these negotiations.

One of the goals of the facilitated negotiations is to determine what additional investigation and data are needed to further develop the cleanup options for downstream portions of the river. EPA believes additional sampling – similar to the EPA sampling conducted at Plainwell and Otsego City impoundments – is needed. Another goal of the negotiations is to gather information from the Natural Resource Trustees to help EPA fully develop a cleanup option that would allow for future dam removal. An example of the information that may be needed is what effect removing the state-owned dams would have on downstream dams that remain in place or on Lake Allegan. These questions were not answered by the U.S. Geological Survey study. The USGS study only addressed what would happen to river sediment and where downstream bank erosion would occur if the state-owned dams catastrophically failed.

The intended result of the negotiations is a legally binding agreement between the responsible parties and EPA that will authorize the responsible parties to finish – under EPA's oversight – the remedial investigation/feasibility

study for the rest of the river. The negotiations should start this summer and are expected to last from six months to a year.

### Status of landfills

Here's an update on the cleanup status of the former paper mill landfills that are located along the Kalamazoo River.

Willow Boulevard/A-Site landfills: EPA is developing a cleanup project outlined in a document called a proposed plan. EPA is waiting for MDEQ approval on the remedial investigation/feasibility study so it can publish a legal notice on the cleanup plan and hold a public meeting.

12<sup>th</sup> Street landfill: EPA is working with the responsible parties to get a protective cover constructed and ground-water wells installed.

Allied Paper landfill: MDEQ continues to work on the remedial investigation. EPA will take over this project when the state study is completed.

King Highway landfill: This landfill is closed and covered. MDEQ will continue to oversee the ground-water monitoring program and maintenance of this landfill.

### Next steps

EPA will hold a workshop so the community can understand how modeling is performed and what information it will produce that is important to the public, such as when people can expect to safely eat Kalamazoo River fish. EPA will also hold regular update meetings to keep people informed on the progress of the modeling and the facilitated negotiations. These update meetings will occur every three months and will be announced in advance through mailings such as this and newspaper notices.



*King Highway Landfill*



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## ALLIED PAPER/PORTAGE CREEK/KALAMAZOO RIVER SUPERFUND SITE: Kalamazoo River Cleanup Decisions on Hold

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### Information libraries

The public can read documents related to the Kalamazoo River Superfund site at these places:

Kalamazoo Public Library  
315 S. Rose  
Kalamazoo

Otsego District Library  
219 S. Farmer St.  
Otsego

Waldo Library  
Western Michigan University  
1903 W. Michigan Ave.  
Kalamazoo

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